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Papers

Julia Pastrana: The Bearded Lady

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Julia Pastrana (1834–1860), variously known as the ape-faced, dog-faced or simply the hairy woman, is commonly referred to as an example of generalized hypertrichosis associated with gingival hyperplasia (Le Double & Houssay 1912, Danforth 1925, Felgenhauer 1969, Colyer & Sprawson 1942). The best known picture of her (Fig 1), in which she is wearing a richly



Fig 1 Julia Pastrana. From Hutchinson et al. (1900)

embroidered dress, of a length that in her time would have been regarded as immodest except in a dancer or circus performer, is said to originate from a photograph in the possession of the Royal Anthropological Institute of London. The name Geo C Wick can be seen close to the lower border of the photograph. A photograph, exactly similar apart from a few details such as the absence of the name Geo C Wick, is in the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England.

In the Odontological Museum is a pair of casts of the jaws of Julia Pastrana (Fig 2) which show a few unusually large teeth projecting from greatly thickened and irregular alveolar processes. It is impossible to be certain whether some prominences are projecting tooth cusps or nodules of gingiva.

Julia Pastrana enjoyed a good deal of fame in her lifetime, and for many years subsequently. Much has been written about her, though the sources are at present very scattered. My purpose is to bring the information together and to develop the interest that lies in these casts of her mouth, in Julia herself and in this photograph of her.

It is possible that these casts were originally part of the museum of the College of Dentists which was founded in 1856 a few weeks after the Odontological Society of London. The College flourished for seven years and then, in 1863, together with its library and museum, which were both considerable, it was absorbed into the Odontological Society. It is recorded in the transactions of the College of Dentists that, on 6 October 1859, A Thompson presented casts of the mouth of Miss Julia Pastrana, the Nondescript. Uncertainty, however, exists about the origin of the casts now extant, because there is also a record (Tomes 1876) that Mr R Hepburn presented a set of such casts to the Society. Furthermore, at one of its meetings in 1878, Mr Weiss mentioned that he had examined the mouth of Julia Pastrana and made the casts of it 'which were now in the Society's museum'.



Fig 2 Plaster casts of the upper (L) and lower (R) jaws of Julia Pastrana. Odontological Museum specimen F22.4



Fig 3 A drawing of Julia Pastrana from life by I König. From Gartenlaube (1857)

If these are the College of Dentists' casts, they have a connexion with Charles Darwin who makes some reference to them in his 'Variations in Animals and Plants of 1868. He says that Mr Wallace, who was almost certainly the Alfred Russell Wallace who shared with Darwin the discovery of the principle of natural selection, told him that a dentist, Dr Purland, had made casts of her jaws. Dr T Purland was Curator of the College of Dentists Museum in the years before it joined the Odontological Society and it seems likely that Darwin was in error and Purland showed casts that were in the Museum and not ones he had prepared himself. Magitot (1873), the distinguished French anatomist, also mentions having been shown these casts by Dr Purland during a visit to London. Duhousset (1873) mentions having examined casts of her jaws, on the basis of which he recognized that her mouth condition was due to gingival hyperplasia and that she did not possess an excessive number of teeth in double rows, a statement which was perpetuated by Darwin (1868) and even by C S Tomes as late as 1874, though in his textbook of 1876 he gave an accurate account of her condition.

Parreidt (1886) confidently states that the only teeth missing from Julia Pastrana's dentition at the age of 20 years, apart from the third molars, were two upper incisors and a lower canine.



Fig 4 Julia Pastrana, as she appeared in life, exhibited in London 1857. A photograph in the F T Buckland collection, Royal College of Surgeons of England. 'She was all womanly: kind, very charitable and accomplished; she possessed a sweet voice & great taste in music; she spoke three languages, and danced with ease, lightness & grace' (Buckland)

Unfortunately, although his paper is otherwise of particular value because illustrated with plaster casts of the dentitions of other well-known hairy persons, his remarks about Julia derive from Magitot (1873) whose account is based upon his interpretation of the cases Dr Purland showed him.

As to Julia herself, the following is based mainly on an anonymous account of an interview with her in 1858 in Leipzig published in a family magazine illustrated with a drawing made of her (Fig 3) by an artist, I König, who accompanied the interviewer.

Julia Pastrana was a Mexican Indian, who, according to her showman husband, was discovered as an infant abandoned in a remote desert region in Central America. She worked as a servant to the governor of a province of Mexico until 1854 when she was 20 years of age (Boase 1897). In that year, she began her career in the United States as part of the travelling freak shows or circuses that were so popular last century. In due course she arrived in Europe and was seen by Frank Buckland in London in 1857. Fig 4 is a photograph, of what appears to be a

drawing or painting, from Frank Buckland's collection in the Library of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, annotated 'as she appeared in life, exhibited in London 1857'. In Beigel (1868) this same picture is reproduced with acknowledgments to the Reverend J G Wood.

She was 4½ ft (1.68 m) in height, weighed about 112 lb (50.8 kg), possessed a womanly figure and disposition, with slender hands and feet and took much care with her toilet and dress. She took particular delight in elaborate decorated coiffures, as is evident in all portraits of her. What seem to be the most reliable accounts say that her whole body was covered with hair to a variable extent, except the palms of her hands and soles of her feet. She could dance a pretty Highland fling—hence the common description of her as the Mexican dancer. She could converse in three languages, including Spanish and English, though it is said that she was unable to write. At some time, probably before he brought her to Europe, she married her manager, Mr Lewis B Lent.

It appears that the overgrowth of her gum and alveolar process was responsible for her prognathism and what is described as simian appearance. For this reason also she is said to have spoken indistinctly, and yet she is said to have sung in Spanish with a sweet mezzo-soprano voice (Duhousset 1873). In Leipzig in 1857 she appeared on the public stage in a play written for her but there was a great outcry on the grounds of bad taste so that the police intervened and stopped the show. Subsequently she was exhibited more discreetly.

Saltarino (1895), in his book about circus and freak-show people, says that, although to the public eye she was simply an exploited freak who had learned a few tricks to enhance her public image, she was warm-hearted and intelligent and possessed a gentle disposition. She was very conscious of the barrier that her grotesque appearance placed between her and people at large, depriving her of the warmth and affection that she yearned for. It seems that her husband-manager did not encourage her to mix in society and so to reveal that she was a freak only in her external appearance. He feared that if she was not kept remote from the public her power to attract paying audiences might be diminished. Saltarino refers to a friendship that grew up between Julia and a Countess Ostern, as testimony of Julia's amiable disposition and ability to converse interestingly, mainly on things she had read about because her first-hand experiences were limited by her condition. Van Hare (1888) refers to having accompanied Barnum when he called upon Julia Pastrana in London. She received them wearing a heavy veil over her face which she would not remove until Mr Lent came in.



Fig 5 Julia Pastrana. From Saltarino (1895).
Probably not drawn from life but derived
from the originals of Figs 3 & 4

Fig 5 shows a picture of her that was published by Saltarino in 1895. I suspect that it was not drawn or painted from life but derives from the earlier portraits (Figs 3 and 4). The enormous ear seems to derive from the artist's imagination, because it does not appear in the other pictures although it is true that she is recorded as having ears of unusually large size.

In Moscow in 1860, when she was 26 years of age, she gave birth to a hairy boy child who died two days later. Three days after this, Julia herself died, surrounded, according to one account, by a crowd of aristocratic sightseers who heard her dying words: 'I die happy; I know I have been loved for myself'. It is sad to reflect that it seems doubtful whether these pathetic words were true, because, according to one version, her husband-manager, Mr Lent, sold her and her infant to Professor Sukaloff for £500. Professor Sukaloff, who appears to have been Professor of Anatomy in Moscow, embalmed them both, and then the husband, having second thoughts about the commercial possibilities, persuaded the Professor to sell the embalmed bodies back again for the sum of £800.

We cannot be sure that all these details are authentic but it is certain that the pair of embalmed bodies were exhibited all over Europe in

the subsequent twenty years. Her much-quoted dying words derive from Saltarino's book of 1895; the presence of aristocratic sightseers at her death bed is only mentioned by Boulet (1961) and could be the product of journalistic licence. Van Hare (1888) is the source of information about the financial transactions associated with her mummification.

Buckland (1865) describes seeing the embalmed Julia exhibited at Burlington House in London in 1862. It is worth quoting him verbatim:

'I was exceedingly surprised at what I saw. The figure was dressed in the ordinary exhibition costume used in life and placed erect upon the table. The limbs were by no means shrunken or contracted, the arms, chest etc, retaining their former roundness and well-formed appearance. The face was marvellous; exactly like an exceedingly good portrait in wax, but it was *not* formed of wax. The closest examination convinced me that it was the true skin, prepared in some wonderful way; the huge deformed lips and the squat nose remained exactly as in life; the beard and luxuriant growth of soft black hair on and about the face were in no respect changed from their former appearance.'

Buckland had seen her in life five years earlier.

Many references to the Julia who was exhibited for so long and so widely after death used the word 'stuffed', which is strongly suggestive of the taxidermist's art and implies something different



Fig 8 Julia Pastrana. From Boulet (1961). Identical in posture and all other details with Fig 1 but photographed from a different angle



Fig 6 Julia Pastrana lying in the Anatomical Institute, Moscow, during the embalming process. From Manssurow (1889)

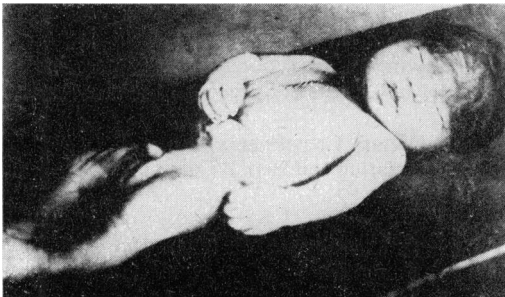


Fig 7 Julia Pastrana's son lying in the Anatomical Institute, Moscow. From Manssurow (1889)

from embalming. However, Brandt (1860), who saw Julia in the Anatomical Institute in Moscow soon after her death, goes out of his way to say that she was being embalmed by an injection process and that it is inaccurate to use the term stuffed.

Figs 6 and 7 show respectively Julia and her son lying in the Anatomical Institute during the process of embalming. They derive from a Russian textbook by Manssurow (1889) cited by Brandt (1897). According to Brandt, the autopsy report suggested that the loss of some teeth and the overgrowth of gingiva were due to severe scurvy at some earlier period. He himself suggested that the protrusion of the alveolar processes seen in this photograph was exaggerated by pressure within the injected vascular system.

The appearance of her son (Fig 7) conforms to descriptions of him seen later when his embalmed body was exhibited beside his mother's, 'like a parrot on a stick' (Saltarino 1895). Bartels (1876) says his skin was dark and yellowish, the head hair was up to 3 cm long, black and straight and extended over the forehead as well as over the back of the neck, though the cheeks were free of hair.

The interest in the details of the embalming process derives from the fact that the photograph of Julia in the embroidered dress (Fig 1) is fairly certainly of her after death, namely, of the embalmed body that Buckland saw and which so impressed him. The natural roundness of the arms and other parts of the body and the upright stance makes this hard to believe. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt. Part of the evidence exists in the photograph itself. There is a certain stiffness in her posture which is suggestive. There is also an unnatural stare in the eyes and, particularly in the original print available at the Royal College of Surgeons, it is possible to discern wrinkling of the skin of the left forearm and right hand which is strongly suggestive of desiccation and loss of elasticity. However, I think conclusive evidence is provided by the existence of another photograph of her (Fig 8), which appears to have been published for the first time by Boulet (1961) in which not only every detail of the richly embroidered dress, &c., is the same but the posture is also the same in every detail. The only difference is that in Fig 1 she has been photographed from in front and in Fig 8 from her left side. It seems unlikely that a living subject would have held this posture or reassumed it for two separate photographs or that she was photographed by two cameras simultaneously.

She is therefore a remarkable example of life-like embalming and one can well understand why she is described as being stuffed.

A few fragments of information about Julia Pastrana are available in *Notes and Queries* (1911), in particular a reference to a portrait of her 'as she now appears embalmed. On each side is Burlington Gallery, 191 Piccadilly. At the bottom is "The above is a correct portraiture of this marvellous specimen of human embalming. Open daily from 11.0 a.m. to 9.0 p.m. Admission one shilling." The figure is very well done and exactly as I remember seeing it about 1861. H.A. ST. J.M.' I have quoted this communication from *Notes and Queries* because it suggests that there is another important picture of Julia which may some time be brought to light.

The ultimate fate of Julia is not known. She is recorded (Bartels 1879) as being in 1876 in Praüscher's People's Museum in Moscow, which was probably a fairground show. The last record of the mummified remains of her and her son was in 1889 when they were exhibited at the Anthropological Exposition in Munich (Saltarino 1895). A living bearded lady called Zenora Pastrana was shown at the same time. This lady was in no way related to Julia. She had taken the name Pastrana in order to attract to herself some of Julia's fame. It seems that Julia Pastrana was

very well known and, in her time and for many years after, her name was a household word through Europe. Some confusion had arisen between the long-dead Julia and the living Zenora and one of the objectives in their being seen at the Exposition in 1889 was to dispel this confusion.

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The following papers reporting dental research at the Royal College of Surgeons were also read:

Effect of Dietary Constituents on Plaque Formation and Dental Caries
 Mr M F Cole

Prospective Fetal Surgery for Facial Deformity
 Miss Dinah Sopher

Histological Studies of Candidal Leukoplakia
 Mr M B Edwards